

THE CHAPLAIN'S AWARENESS OF
FAMILY ROLES IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

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If there is one word that has been characteristic of the family for the past few years, it is the word "changing." Periodicals of every type have described these changes. It is true that opinions have varied greatly on both the causes and results of the changes, but all have agreed that there have been changes. However, changes in the family have not been limited to the last few years. Rather, change has been the pattern for family life through all man's history.

I

There was a time when the father was the absolute head of the family. He served in an authoritarian way as ruler, provider, protector, priest, teacher, and judge. His authority was unquestioned and his role unchallenged. The family was so constituted that it depended upon the father functioning thus. For him to fail, or for him to be stripped of his authority, meant failure for the whole family. In this home, the mother was a servant in one sense of the word and a queen in another. She was bound by her position to a place of service to the family. She was subservient to her husband. She was dependent upon him for provisions, for protection, and for security. At the same time, she was held in honor and esteem as no other person was. The children in the home were economic liabilities who had the possibilities of becoming assets. As soon as the boys were able they started helping with the work of the father. Thus they contributed to the support of the family, and at the same time learned a trade

that would see them through life. The girls helped with the housework and likewise contributed to the family while preparing for the role which would be theirs.

This, in broad outline, has been the pattern of the family for centuries. There have been periods of change, but by and large the pattern has held. This is still the pattern in much of the world today. The family unit centers around a common household governed by the father, serviced by the mother, and used as a training center for the children. Within this framework, the individual members of the family unit find physical sustenance, protection from outside forces, a sense of security, and opportunities for growth. There can also be found a sense of satisfaction in being a contributing member of the group.

Though there have been changes from time to time, the rate of change has been greatly accelerated the past few decades. There are many factors which have contributed to the changes. Economic adjustments have probably been the major causes for change. Linked with this was the feminist movement which had for its goal freeing women from "servitude," as they called it, and proving she was the equal of man. Then came wars which pushed women into industry and out of the home. Statistics today vary on the number of women who work outside the home. Some say there are as many as 80% while others list the number at 40%. It is probably safe to say that well over one half of all married women are now working outside the home and are supplementing the family income.

This change has certainly brought changes to the family role. The father is no longer the sole provider for the family. By the same token, he is no longer the sole governing force. Household chores are no longer done by the mother alone. As a rule there is more sharing of these duties. The fact that

the family must live in the city where places of employment are located has also brought its changes. As a rule the sons no longer are trained by the father to follow his trade. His employment is not such that he can spend time training them. Girls no longer look forward to housekeeping as a major emphasis, but rather they think in terms of employment outside the home. The major emphasis is no longer the centering of family activity and training within the home. The emphasis now is upon earning enough money to provide physical needs and luxuries for the members of the family. The activities and training of the family members are of secondary importance. One may talk loud and long about the reasons for the changes and the results that are coming and will continue to come, but the fact remains the changes have taken place.

II

There are those who feel that all changes are bad and constantly talk of returning to the "good old days." Even if we could return to those days, the majority of people would not want to do it. The changes which have come have changed living conditions to such an extent that no one wants to return to the poorer standard of living. The freedom afforded by present-day society is in direct contrast to the system of former years. The good things of life which are physical have too much of an appeal for people to give them up and return to the barren years of our forefathers. We are far too enamored with our material comforts, our educational advantages, our free time to be used as we like it, our freedom to move from place to place and from society to society, and all the other advantages of our present culture to want to give up our way of life.

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There are also those who feel that all of the evil of our day can be traced to the changes in the home. Certainly it is true that the changes have resulted in some things that are not good. The role of the father has changed drastically. Many men have felt that such a change was a challenge to their masculinity and have gone to extremes to prove they were men. Often the alcoholic, the promiscuous man, or the domineering man is an individual trying to prove his masculinity to himself. The mother also has had to face changes as a result of her role being changed. She is now more of a partner than a subservient. Many people have not been able to adjust to the changes and divorce has been the result. However, all divorces cannot be traced to changes in the structure of our homes, nor is the practice of divorce limited to our present-day society. And certainly the homes of our forefathers were not free of all problems.

The simple fact remains that there have been many changes in the make up and functions of the home. Many of the factors which have caused the changes have helped produce a higher standard of living as far as material things are concerned. These changes have produced some evil as well as some good. All of the evils of our present society cannot be traced to the changes in the home. And in the midst of all these changes, there are still some basic contributions the home needs to make if the people who are a part of that home are to have the stability needed to stand the stress and meet the demands of our present day.

III

Though man's greatest needs are not physical there are certain physical needs which must be met within the family relationship. In the animal world, the young are cared for only for a few weeks and then are pushed out to root

for themselves. They are sufficiently endowed with instincts to care for themselves providing all goes well. If it does not, they will be killed. Nature maintains a balance in this manner. The young of man matures slowly and for years is entirely dependent upon those who brought him into the world. Unless that young is cared for adequately he cannot exist. He is not endowed with instincts that will help him survive. The family is responsible for caring for these physical needs.

Man also has a biological need. The sex urge in man is constant while in the animal it is occasional. Man chooses a mate for life, not just for a mating season. It is in sexual intercourse that the two become one flesh. The sexual appetite is sacred and is to be satisfied within the family relationship. To seek fulfillment outside the marriage is to debase the sacred by making the sex act an end within itself. This reduces man to an animal level. The husband or wife who refuses to meet the need of the partner in this area contributes to the failure of the marriage. The partner may seek satisfaction in an illicit manner, or he may endure for the sake of honor. But in either case, the marriage is not a good one because one member of the family refuses to fulfill one of the basic roles of family life.

One of the greatest tragedies of our day is the misuse of sex. Not only has it become an end within itself, but it has been made the chief end of life for many people. The total blame for this cannot be placed on any one thing or person. However, it can be truthfully said that many people have sought to find satisfaction outside of marriage because of failure to find it inside marriage. The man or woman who becomes so preoccupied with making money, so tired from work, or so anxious to climb a social ladder that he does not meet his partner's sexual need is contributing to the destruction of the home and society

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by failing to fulfill a vital family role. His contribution to failure may be even greater than the one who commits the overt act of adultery.

IV

The home also continues to be an educational institution. It may provide bad education, but it provides education. Society looks upon the school systems to educate, but educations cannot be limited to formal training received in school. Someone has said that a child learns more the first three years of his life than he does all the rest of his life put together. This is before the public school even sees him. The child's learning is not limited to a few hours a day five days a week. He is always learning. The family that does not recognize the home as an educational institution fails in one of its vital roles.

This educating is done partly by training. The family has a certain pattern by which it lives. The children grow up in that pattern. The child reacts to life in the way he has been trained. Like an athlete who has trained himself until his reflexes react to a situation before he has had time to think, the child reacts according to the pattern in which he has been set. We use the expression "mother tongue." By this we mean the individual is speaking like he learned to speak in his home. Usually, the manner of speech is wrong, but other institutions have failed to change his way of speaking. He was educated thus in his home.

The family also educates through discipline. There are many who contend that this is a lost art, and when one looks at the tremendous amount of lawlessness, he has the tendency to agree. Discipline is a very vital part of education. A person is not likely to learn to discipline himself unless he is taught. The family that fails to discipline the children not only contributes

to their failure to respect authority, but they also fail to help them learn the art of self-discipline which is so needful for a balanced life.

The family also teaches by example. The silent influence of the family determines the standard of conduct accepted by those who grow up with the family. The standard may be a poor one, but it becomes the accepted one. This teaching is not planned nor are the results necessarily what the family would normally desire. Yet the results are as permanent as any teaching done anywhere.

V

The family also has a responsibility as far as recreation is concerned. There was a time when practically all of the recreation was provided by the home. The pendulum has swung to the other extreme and there are many now who apparently feel that the home has no responsibility for recreation. Perhaps a failure to recognize the importance of recreation and to assume responsibility for it by the family has been one of the major contributions to the ills of our society. There are those who seem to think that recreation consists only of activities that require physical exertion. Actually, recreation consists of anything the individual or group may use with which to relax. Even watching television can be a form of recreation.

Every individual needs to relax at times. Life has problems for every individual from the time he enters the world until he leaves it. Unless he can relax, the pressures of those problems will destroy him. The way he handles those problems will be determined in the main by the way he learned at home. Whether he is able to "roll with the punch" or whether he turns to some narcotic to help him escape that punch can be determined by how he has learned to relax. A great many people are conquered by life's problems simply because

they have never learned to relax in a wholesome fashion. The home from which they came probably failed to give them any help in this area by neglecting the whole area of recreation. It is often said that the individual's use of his free time affects his total life far more than the use of his scheduled time. This emphasizes the right use of that free time and calls attention to the need for help in learning to use it properly.

VI

The home also needs to provide a sense of security for those that are in it. Perhaps there is no greater need that man has than his sense of security. Most men spend an entire life trying to find a security for themselves and their family. Unfortunately, they think of security largely in terms of the material. The tragedy is that this does not provide a sense of security even after it has been gained in large measures. The sense of security which they crave comes from within not from without. A man may live in the finest house money can buy, be surrounded by all the comforts that have been invented, and still feel insecure. Another man may have none of these and have a perfect sense of security.

To have the feeling of security needed, the individual must feel that he belongs. He must be accepted for what he is. There must not be the feeling that he is chattel property to be used for others. Each person is a distinct personality and must be accepted as such. He also must have the assurance he is needed. No person can be constantly receiving, never giving, and have any feeling of worth. The family must give the opportunity even for its youngest members to render an acceptable service to others.

This individual must also have a sense of ownership. He does not need to own large amounts, but he needs to feel that there are things that are his.

This gives a sense of permanency. The child who grows up in a family knowing that what belongs to the family belongs to him has a base on which the sense of security can be built.

To feel secure one also has to have a sense of comradeship. No man really feels he can face the world alone. A family unit that does not provide this fellowship is derelict in duty. Loneliness can destroy the strongest people. A child that is shoved aside and left out of the family activities, or left to root for himself, can be permanently injured. The family that becomes so busy that it has no time to spend with each other may cause those within its circle to live in bitter loneliness.

To have a sense of security one needs also to have an assurance of love. This is not some light and sentimental talk. This is a real love which seeks to give of itself, knowing that in the same sense others will give for you. Such a love, and the feeling of security that comes from it, can be found only within a family group.

VII

The family also is responsible for making a spiritual contribution to its members. Though many families never realize they have this responsibility they are making a contribution. It may be negative rather than positive, but it is being made. The effort to leave all spiritual contributions and religious education to institutions outside the home is futile. A family unit cannot exist without making an impact upon the spiritual nature of its members. The family that spends all its time and energy caring for the physical needs of its members with no concern for the spiritual is living on an animal level. The one thing that distinguishes man from animal is his spiritual nature, and to neglect it is to reduce him to an animal level.

Actually, the real test of the validity of religious teachings will be found in the home. Religious institutions, such as the church, teach religious ideals. These ideals are based upon the acceptance of God and the use of the scripture. No matter how well they are taught, they remain ideals. For them to become accepted, they must be put in practice. They then become the convictions of those who practice them. It is within the home that these ideals are accepted or rejected. And often the family claims to accept them while in practice they reject them. In such instances, the family members accept the practice and reject the theory. The family has negated any spiritual teaching which outside institutions may have given. And in its silent way, the family has continued its practice of teaching spiritual things even though that teaching is bad.

There was a time when the majority of active Christians maintained some type of regular family worship. Family worship in the home today is rare. Even the practice of returning thanks at meal time has declined to such a great extent that it is indeed the exception rather than the rule. Whatever excuse may be used for the change, the fact still remains that the decline of such practices has brought a corresponding decline of spiritual contributions by the home. In many a case it has caused a complete change. At one time that home that had family worship was making a positive spiritual contribution, now its spiritual contribution is negative. Just because a family is not concerned with spiritual things does not eliminate its responsibility in the area. Every home makes a spiritual contribution of some kind. There are no exceptions. The wise family will do whatever is necessary to make certain the contribution is a positive one.

Through the centuries change has been the lot of man. Changes have really done nothing to or for man. It has been man's reaction to those changes that

that has determined their worth. Often times the change has been responsible for good and at other times evil. Through all the changes, the family unit has stood. It also has been subjected to many changes and its reaction to these has been varied. The family still plays the most vital role of any institution in our society, and there continues to be the need to exercise extreme care that it fulfills its responsibilities to the fullest in these changing times.